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ABSTRACT

In spring 1982, a study was conducted at a predominantly white two-year business college to investigate students' aspirational goals and determine if their goals differed significantly at three levels of desired occupational mobility, i.e., upon graduation, in 5 years, and in 10 years. The study sample of 58 students, who were randomly selected from an enrollment roster of 550, consisted largely of young, white females. The study revealed that: (1) 98% of the students felt career opportunities would exist for them after graduation; (2) 59% said they knew someone who had succeeded in their own field of study; (3) 41% anticipated a $10,000-15,000 income after graduation, while 15% anticipated an income over $25,000; (4) although there was no significant difference between students' career aspirational goals upon graduation and their 5-year career goals, their 5-year goals were significantly different than their 10-year goals; and (5) 19% of the respondents failed to list immediate post-graduation career goals, and 37% did not list 5-or 10-year goals. The study results indicated that students were either unaware of career mobility and opportunities in their field or that they equated mobility with years of experience and age. In addition, the results suggested a need for the college to assist students in deciding on career paths. (Author/LL)

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AN ANALYSIS OF ASPIRATIONAL GOALS OF TWO-YEAR BUSINESS COLLEGE STUDENTS *

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ABSTRACT

As more college graduates began to enter the job market, jobs became more competitive and scarce by the late 70s. College graduates had a degree, but no job. Eventually, it was not long before the value of college was questionable.

Was a degree essential for preconditioned opportunities and success? This question of concern was still lingering at the beginning of a new decade, 1980. It lingers at a time when the nation's unemployment rate has soared more than 10 percent, and college graduates are expecting payoff returns from invested college years. Will college students begin to re-evaluate career goals by shifting gears? Anne Young (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1982) contends, "Employers continue to use education as one of the basic qualifications for hiring and promotion ...." She also reports that participation rates in the labor force were slightly higher in 1981 for people with 4 years or more college.

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate career aspirational goals of two-year college students. The secondary purpose was to determine if career aspirational goals differ significantly at three levels of desired mobility: upon graduation, in 5 years, and in 10 years.

Fifty-eight college students from a two-year business college were randomly selected for the study. The sample included a larger proportion of females (N=51) than males (N=7); similarly, a larger proportion of whites (N=39) than blacks and other minorities (N=19).

Data variables were clustered into discrete categories that related to the major fields of study: business administration, secretarial, data processing, medical administration, travel and airlines, and fashions and merchandising. Chi-square measurements were used to analyze and test the hypotheses. The level of significance was set at the .05 level.

Data results revealed that 98 percent of the students feel that opportunities will exist for them after graduation. 59 percent said they know someone who has succeeded in their field of study. 41 percent of the sample are anticipating a $10,000-$15,000 income after graduation; while 15 percent anticipate an income over $25,000.

There was not a significant difference between career aspirational goals upon graduation and 5-year career goals ($X^2 = 9.0$, df = 7, $p > .30$). Yet, when 5-year career goals were compared with 10-year career goals, there was a significant difference ($X^2 = 23.22$, df = 9, $p < .01$).

Despite the dismal outlook facing our society, the study infers that the students who attend the two-year business college are optimistic about career opportunities. Budig's study(1979) also found that enrollments in business schools had escalated as much as 50 percent. The students in his study were also optimistic that job opportunities will exist in business and industry.

An important implication from the study is business students are interested and optimistic about immediate employment after graduation; however, they have not planned for 5-year career goals. As the Bureau of Labor Statistics continues to show occupational growth with secretaries, managers, medical, accountants, bookkeepers, and computers, business students need to be concerned and aware of career mobility and opportunities in their field of study.

The study also implies that further research is needed to determine if there is a correlation between age/sex and career aspirational goals.

INTRODUCTION

The need for a "good education" has always been endorsed by our society. It meant having an "American Express" to a good job and socioeconomical status and prestige. The more education one had, the likelihood for acquiring and enjoying the fruits of life (Broom and Selznick, 1975; Havighurst and Neugarten, 1975).

As job opportunities and earnings became commensurate with levels of education attainments, more high school graduates saw a college education as an investment with high rates of return for adult life. By 1970, colleges and universities were forced to expand facilities and programs to meet the growing demand for education. In 1970, 32.7 percent of high school graduates were enrolled in college, compared to a 23.7 percent enrollment in 1960 (1980 U. S. Bureau of Census). College enrollments increased as much as 47 percent from 1963 to 1978 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1980). Pursuing post-secondary education had become the American way of life, and as Havighurst and Neugarten (1975, p. 37) pointed out: "The American education system is expected to provide opportunity for social and economic mobility by selecting the most able and industrious youth for higher-status positions in society."

Thus, educational attainments emerged as a consumer good and investment, as the rate of unemployment began to rise in the United States. By 1975, a substantial number of college graduates had entered a job market that had an 8.5 percent unemployment rate, compared to the 4.9 percent rate in 1973 (Handbook of Labor Statistics, 1977). The

economic status was deteriorating, and the job opportunities were becoming more competitive and scarce for the college graduate. There was not a great demand for college graduates. Freeman and Holloman (1975, p. 24) observed: "This golden age of higher education came to an abrupt end at the outset of the 1970's, when the 25-year boom in the college market bust. For the first time in recent history, new bachelor's graduates began to have difficulty obtaining jobs . . . . "

College students not only found it difficult to obtain a job, but they also had difficulties finding a job that required college training. The idea that a college education would lead to financial gains and upward mobility became a myth as more young graduates faced a daunted future. Perrella (1973); Havighurst and Levine (1979) reported that in 1972, the unemployment rate for recent graduate students was 9.3 percent, compared with 5.6 percent for all workers. Twenty-five percent of the new graduates were employed on jobs that were not related to college studies. The need for degrees and the value of higher education was declining (Blank, 1972; Mills, 1975; Freeman and Holloman, 1975; Richman and Farmer, 1977; Ellis, 1980)

Freeman (1976) observed the college graduate as an "Overeducated American". His study reflected no significant differences with opportunities for college graduates and high school graduates. With a significant decline in the college labor market, rapid rate of salary decreases, and unrelated jobs, a college education was not paying off.

Mills (1975, pp. 269-270) asserted that education can only lead to success when the occupational needs of a society demand education.

He further noted:

> During the last half century, college graduates, increasing four times as much as the general population, were involved in the expansion of higher white-collar occupations. So education paid off: ten years ago, college graduates earned one-third more than United States average. Today, however, college graduates earn only one-tenth more than the United States average, and, according to an informed prediction by Seymour E. Harris, in twenty years, 'it won't pay to be educated'.

With the distorted image of a college education, business and industry reduced or deleted college recruitment programs. Many jobs did not require college education. Employers wanted applicants with specific skills. This change precipitated many students to re-evaluate the educational training needed to attain career goals with a promising future.

Parenthetically, colleges and universities re-examined their goals and purposes for existing as they observed the enrollment increases with two-year junior and community colleges (Blank, 1972; Bowen, 1974; Marland, 1974). Marland (1974, p.55) associated the problem with the belief that "we have created a widely-held belief that only by way of the bachelor's degree can a person be truly whole, truly worthy." He further inferred that students turned to two-year colleges, as well as proprietary schools, for specific skills. Wattenberg (1977, p. 75) also observed:

> At a time when everyone was loudly thumping breast about how "our institutions aren't responsive anymore, they're failing us," an old but little recognized institution, the two-year college, has been transformed, enlarged, multiplied, redesigned and come out as a new vehicle to bring young and eager Americans into the educational middle class.

Despite this newly adopted attitude about pursuing education in two-year institutions, a number of changing factors are beginning to unfold in the job market. Despite the 1982 depressed economical

report that the nation's unemployment rate was approaching 10 percent, and 1.8 million people were out of work, labor statistical reports reflected improved occupational mobility with more educational attainments. Anne Young (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1982) contends, "More education has historically been associated with higer rates of labor force participation, a pattern that persisted in March 1981." She further asserts that the educational level of workers has increased significantly in recent years, because employers continue to use education as one of the basic qualifications for hiring and promotion.

Between 1970 and 1981, the proportion of workers with only 1 to 3 years of college who held white-collar jobs decreased 12 percentage points among men and almost 3 percentage points among women. Substantial increases in the professions for college graduates did not reflect because of the number of graduates competing for the available jobs (Young, pp. 53-54).

Four-year college graduates declines seem to be leading to more opportunities for available entry jobs. If the demand for a trained labor force continues to grow, can the students who decided to enter two-year institutions compete with workers with more education? Can two-year college students expect to achieve their career aspirational goals when the nation's economical status seems to be immobilized? Mills (1975), Broom and Selznick (1975), and Kanter (1977) postulate that when there is no educational, occupational, or socioeconomical

mobility, low aspirations will occur. Mills (1975, pp. 271-272) asserts:

> As demand for educated people falls behind supply, as educated occupations are divided and rationalized, as enrollments continue to rise, the income and prestige differences between the more-educated and the less-educated masses decreases. Among those who are not allowed to use the educated skills they have acquired, boredom increases, hope for success collapses into disappointment, and the sacrifices that don't pay off lead to disillusionment.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate career aspirational goals of two-year college business students. The secondary purpose was to determine if career aspirational goals differ significantly at three levels of desired mobility levels: upon graduation, 5-year, and 10-year.

The study addressed four research questions:

1. Why did the students select a business field of study?
2. Are the students who attend the two-year business college optimistic about future job opportunities in their field?
3. What career aspirational goals do the students have upon graduation, and in 5 and 10 years?
4. Is there a significant difference between the 3 mobility levels of career aspirations?

The null hypotheses stated: (1) 5-year career aspitations do not differ significantly from those desired upon graduation. (2) There is no significant difference between 5 and 10-year goals.

The study was based on testing the null hypotheses against the alternate hypotheses which stated there are significant differences between the three levels of career aspirations.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Data were collected from a predominant white two-year business college located in a business-industrial metropolitan area. Most of the students who attend the college are employed (66%) with an income under $5,000.

During the Spring Quarter, 1982, fifty-eight students were randomly selected from the enrollment roster of approximately 550. The sample included students who had enrolled at the beginning of the quarter; students who were continuing their studies, and those completing their last quarter of studies. A larger proportion of the sample consisted of females(N = 51) and whites (N = 39). Although the sample only included a small number of males (N = 7), as well as blacks and minorities (N = 19), they were in proportion to an enrollment that consisted of largely white female students. A larger percentage of the sample was between the ages of 20 - 25(forty percent); while twenty-nine percent was less than 20 years of age; twenty-eight percent was 26 -35, and three percent was 36 - 45. In addition, a larger percentage of the sample was single(57%) and had at least one child(69%).

Instrumentation

An opened/closed questionnaire was designed and used to assess data from the subjects. 31 of the questions were structured to include a limited number of alternative responses to be checked. Most of the items included an "other" category; while other items included space for an additional response to a question. The item questions facilitated the researcher with descriptive information and attitudinal measurements of:(1) subjects as individuals/groups attending the college; (2) present employment and schooling status; (3) family background and influence, and (4) career interest, attitude, and aspirations.

5 of the questions were open-ended items to permit the respondents to facilitate the researcher in ascertaining: (1) career fields, (2) career reasons, and (3) career aspirational goals.

The instrument to be used for the study was given to four people to see if they could complete it with understanding; to make comments and suggestions, and to see if there were other alternative responses that should be included. After the feedback was given, two of the questions were revised, each question was coded with numbers, and administered to the subjects.

DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Based on the responses to career aspirations upon graduation, aspiration variables were clustered into six categories. As shown in Table I, these categories were defined according to the six career fields and college programs. The data showed that the majority of the students in the medical, business, and fashion fields anticipate career goals within their fields of study upon graduation. Some of the respondents failed to respond (19 percent).

Data results showed that when students were asked about career aspirational goals in 5 years, some of the aspirations were extensions of career-training programs (e.g. nursing, management, consulting). Therefore, some of the previous category variables were redefined, and other categories were added. Aspirational goals upon graduation and in 5 years were clustered into eight discrete categories that related to the fields of study. (See Table II.) More than one goal was given by respondents; whereas, 22 (37 percent) respondents did not list any goals.

When students were asked about anticipated career goals in 10 years,

TABLE I

Graduation Career Goals Based on Business Career Fields of Study

Career Fields	N	Career Aspiration Upon Graduation	N
Medical Administrative Assistant	20	Doctor's Assistant, Laboratory Technician	18
Travel and Airlines	19	Tour Host, Stewardess, Reservationist	7
Secretarial (Professional/Executive)	6	Secretary	4
Business Administration	10	Business Administration (Bookkeeper, Accountant, Management, Consultant)	10
Data/Computer Programming	8	Programmer	5
Fashions/Other	1	Buyer/Self-Employed	2

TABLE II

Graduation and 5-Year Career Aspirational Goals of Two-Year Business College Students

Categories of Career Goals [a]	Upon Graduation	5-Year
	N	N
Medical Assistant	18	10
Nurse (LPN/RN)	0	4
Travel and Airlines (Reservationist, Stewardess)	7	7
Business (Bookkeeper, Accountant)	3	1
Secretarial	4	3
Data/Computer Programmer	5	2
Management/Consultant	7	7
Buyer/Self-Employed	2	1

[a] Categories include graduation goal variables that were redefined to analyze with 5-year goals.

some of the responses differed from those previously given for 5-year goals. As a result, 5-year category variables were redefined, and two new categories were added to compare 5 and 10-year career aspirational goals. Table III shows the new variable were clustered into ten categories.

The categories included variables that were not previously examined in 5-year categories (doctor, executive, supervisor, analyst, CPA, marketing).

Contingency tables with frequency distributions in each cell enabled the researcher to examine the variables more independently. Chi-square measurements were utilized to analyze and test the hypotheses that (1) graduation and 5-year career aspirational goals do not differ significantly; (2) 5 and 10-year career aspitational goals do not differ significantly. The level of significance was set at .05.

When graduation career aspirations were compared with 5-year career aspirations, occupational mobility in 5 years was not anticipated. Basically, the career goals remained the same. Students in the medical field are anticipating occupational mobility within their field of study. Yet, there was not a significant difference between career aspirational goals upon graduation and 5-year career goals ($X^2 = 9.0$, $df = 7$, $p > .30$). Since p was larger than the previous established significance level set at .05, the null hypothesis that graduation and 5-year aspirations would not reflect a significant change was not rejected.

Conversely, when 5-year career goals were compared with 10-year career goals, the students not only had different career aspitations in 10 years, but they desired goals beyond the educational training goals. As shown in Table III, in 10 years, fewer students desire medical assistant opportunities they had previously anticipated upon graduation and in 5 years; some of the students are anticipating being a doctor, executive,

TABLE III

5 And 10-Year Career Aspirational Goals
of Two-Year Business College Students

Categories of Career Goals [a]	5-Year N	10-Year N
Medical Assistant	10	4
Nurse (LPN/RN)	4	4
Doctor	0	2
Travel/Airlines (Reservationist)	3	4
Stewardess	4	1
Secretarial/Bookkeeper	4	2
Programmer/Analyst	2	3
Executive/Supervisor	0	14
CPA/Marketing	0	2
Self-Employed	1	3

[a] Categories include 5-year goal variables that were redefined to analyze with 10-year goals.

CPA, and marketer. The number of students who desired being a stewardess and secretary in 5 years decreased in 10 years; whereas self-employment increased.

The null hypothesis which stated that there was no significant difference between 5 and 10 year career aspirational goals was rejected ($X^2 = 23.22$, df = 9, $p < .01$). Table IV shows that $p < .01$ is less than the previous established significance level set at .05. The data suggest that the students do not expect occupational mobility until 10 years after they have completed their educational training.

TABLE IV

Differences Between Career Aspirational Levels
of Two-Year Business College Students

Career Mobility Levels	Chi-Square	df	p
Graduation/5-year	9.0	7	>.30
5-year/10year	23.22	9	<.01 [a]

[a] p is less than level of significance set at .05.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The following conclusions and implications resulted from the study:

1. Despite the dismal economical outlook facing our society, the students attending the two-year business college are optimistic about future career opportunities.
2. The Bureau of Labor Statistics continues to show occupational growth with secretaries, managers, medical, accountants, and bookkeepers. Yet, the students, which largely consisted of young females, have short-term goals (upon graduation) and long-term goals (10-year), but intermediate goals (5-year) are not projected. The results suggest the students attending the college are either unaware of career mobility and opportunities existing in their field of study, or they equate occupational mobility with years of experience and age.
3. Since 19 percent of the subjects failed to list career goals upon graduation, and 37 percent did not list any 5 and 10-year career goals, the business college could assist students in finding and deciding the best career path for them.
4. High anticipated salary earnings after graduation reflect the need for students to know how to plan for attainable goals that are commensurate with not only educational levels, but occupational mobility levels as well. The study could be extended to see if the aspirational goals were correlated with salary expectation.

5. Career educational programs are also needed at the college level, especially since there are current and projected changes in the job market.
6. Students who have more career aspirational goals should be encouraged to further their education beyond the educational training at the two-year business college.
7. Further research is also needed to determine if a correlation exists between age/sex and career aspirational goals.
8. More study is needed to determine if there is a significant difference between aspirational goals of four-year and two-year college business students
9. Since recent statistics revealed that college graduates with more education are apt to acquire professional and technical jobs, attitudinal measurements would enable the researcher to determine if two-year college business students feel they can complete equally with four-year business students in the job market.

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